BOOK REVIEW

EPIC OF FAITH: Love of Gracious God, Mohammad (SS) by A. Rauf Luther; published by Dilshad Sons Publishers, 10-Gopi Street, Chowburji, Lahore; First Print, 1981; Price: Rs. 150.

This book enjoys a unique position among the biographies of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) so far written in any Western language, as it happens to be the first versified biography of the Prophet in any Western language.

According to the list appended to the book, the author has also written "Mohammad, the Prophet of Peace", "Mohammad, the Divine Envoy", "Mohammad, Mercy for the Universe," "Truth unveiled", "Shock and Shriek", "Uncontrolled Island", "Muslim way of Life", "Beads of Pearls", "Sweet Hopes" and "Shamael Rasul". But the years of publication of the books are not mentioned, and it is not known whether they have been published at all. Any how these works show the extreme devotion and depth of study of the author of the life and teachings of the Holy Prophet.

The book opens with the following lines:
Almighty God; Thou art the grace  
Of Love, Affection and Solace;  
Bless us Thy Love, service to man,  
Irrespective of colour and clan. (p. 3)

These lines represent in a nut-shall the spirit of the message conveyed by the author throughout the book.

Then the poet gives a resume of his life in one page. He says that he was born in Sialkot in 1916.

School to school, college to college  
As my future could acknowledge;  
From place to place I knowledge traced,  
Then, all alone, Islam embraced. (p. 4)

He then tells us that he studied at Jullunder, Government College, Hoshiarpur, S.E. College, Bahawalpur and Islamia College, Lahore. He also tells us that he studied and learned much from Chaucer, Milton, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth and Byron. (p. 4)

As regards the matter concerning the biography of the Holy Prophet contained in the book, the author has himself admitted that he has not dealt with the whole life of the Holy Prophet, but has only dealt with a few salient features of his biography. He says:

Authentic version I shall offer,  
For intelligent, average reader;  
Not all incidents or features,  
But the salient and the sweeter.
One of the most interesting features of the book is that any part dealing with the biography of the Holy Prophet, each section or Chapter opens with a verse or part of a verse from the Holy Qur'an with its versified English translation, though sometimes incomplete or at times with some addition.

So the Chapter dealing with the Prophet's early life opens with the following verse:

ماكان محمد ابا احد من رجالكم ولكن رسول الله وخاتم النبىين وكان الله يكل شيء علماء

Likewise, the Chapter on the Prophet's engagement in trade opens with the verse No. LXI: 10; the Chapter on *Bi'that* with verse No. XLVIII: 28; the Chapter on *Mi'râj* with verse No. XVII: 1 & VIII: 10; his Migration to Medina with No. IV: 100; his early life at Medina with XV: 67; his wars and treaties with IX: 41; the Chapter on "Ka'ba divorces Idols" with No. II: 125 and the Chapter on "Islam-Muhammad-Qur'an" with No. XIV: 3.

It may, however, be added that in some of the above cases full text of the Qur'anic verse has not been given in the book, although the author has given the English translation of the whole verse. In some cases the Arabic text of the verse does not agree with the English translation, while in some other cases the author has given incomplete translation of the verse cited. So also sometimes the author has mixed up two Qur'anic verses in his versified English translation.

In the end, the author has explained in verse what is meant by the "Blessed Names of Muhammad" (Peace be upon him), (pp. 233—257) and "Name of Allah" (pp. 259—294). While explaining the meanings of the names of the Holy Prophet, the author seems to have misunderstood the meanings of some of the names, as he has translated "Rasheed" as "Innocent, Obedient", "Ummey" (Umee) as "Mother of Knowledge", "Faseeh" as "Elucidator", "Moharrim" as "Unlawfulness"(?), "Shakoor" as "Gratefulness of Soul"(?) and "Muneeb" as "Advancer to Right". Then under the names of Allah, he has translated "Al-Raheem" as "mercifulness" and has given a very strange, rather ridiculous explanation of the word "Allah" (p. 261).

At times the author, in ecstasy, has forgotten the real details of an event and has gone too far. For example, while narrating the event of the marriage of the Holy Prophet with *Hadrat* Khadija the author says:

The Arabs relished songs and dance,
With eager eyes upon the bronze
Of the dancer's bodies, scarlet lips,
And wavering of their circular hips. (p. 60)

This seems to be an invention of the author himself, and a sheer misstatement and misrepresentation of the whole event, as the marriage of the Holy Prophet took place in all solemnity and sobriety, free from pomp and show and the heathen customs of pre-Islamic Arabia.

Likewise, the physical description of Hinda (given on p. 164) is rather too sensua and quite unbecoming for a book like *Seerat* of the Holy Prophet.
So also he seems to be under some misunderstanding while mentioning the age of the Holy Prophet at the time of the marriage as twenty-nine (p. 55), although later (on page 61) he describes that the Holy Prophet passed fifteen years of his married life with Ḥaḍrat Khadija, when she was fifty-five and "Mohammad marching in his forty" (p. 61).

The author is a Muslim convert from Christianity, and so we find some Christian terminology interspersed here and there in the context of Muslim beliefs. Particularly his extra-ordinary love for "Love", which is so passionately and vigorously advocated by him throughout the book, is certainly reminiscent of his past faith in Christianity. This element of love found so much in abundance in the author is meant for Allah, His beloved Prophet, Ḥaḍrat Mohammad, (peace be upon him), and Allah's creatures.

In love such sacrifice prevails,
Which save beloved none entails;
To live for Him, with Him, in Him,
Remember with all praise for Him. (p. 18)

After Allâh and the Holy Prophet, the poet has an extreme devotion towards Ḥaḍrat 'Ali, whose exploits and services for Islam he has recounted most admirably here and there in the book, and has even eulogized him under a separate chapter entitled: "Ali, Divine Inspired Soul" (pp. 295-320). He has also praised Ḥaḍrat Abû Bakr, Ḥaḍrat 'Umar and Ḥaḍrat Khâlid for their services for Islam.

As regards the author's diction, it is quite uneven and irregular. Sometimes we find some exquisite pieces of poetry which remind us of the poetry of Tennyson and Arnold. For example, we have the following lines in "Mohammad, Love of Gracious God":

"Mohammad Apostle for all times
Over the Universe held sublime;
His morals, manners, way of life;
Aglow to nourish religious life;
Miraculous were his words indeed
Miraculous birth, death and deed." (p. 14)

So also we come across some very beautiful stanzas on pages 13, 121, 130, 155, 214, 220, 314, 315, 317 and most of the poems entitled: "Sweet Hopes", "Creation" and "Satan's Sting"

Mostly the author has tried to follow the rhyming system, but at times it seems that in a flow of ecstasy, he has completely forgotten to abide by this requirement. So we find a large number of lines here and there not duly rhymed, and are rather written in poetic prose. The poet has himself admitted this flaw in the following words:

Drunk from Hippocrene's fount,
I say, I do not know or count
Rhyme and Rhythm which I have covered
Composed I poems when overpowered. (p. 4)

Throughout the book the poet has tried to impress upon the Muslim readers their plight and exhort them to reform themselves and get rid of the present abysmal and miserable condition in all the walks of life. He says:
In all my verses runs a shriek
Which is the gift of trodden meek;
To shedding sorrows, Aegean grief,
I went on writing for relief. (p. 4)

Referring to the present deplorable condition of the Muslims, the poet says:

The FAITH that had cemented,
With love the stranger's heart;
Its orbit is dismantled,
The brothers are wide apart. (p. 5)
The learned aren't intelligent
And the illiterate are wild;
Generous proud and prominent,
The poor in beggary coil'd. (p. 6).
Selfishness rampant everywhere,
Corruption, bribery steer clear
Like ugly vultures avaricious,
Lo! yet we say, 'We are righteous.' (p. 326)
Sweet hope he cherishes steer
But company seeks that God abhors;
Sweet hope he cherishes to aspire,
But flings himself in mundane mire. (p. 333).

The poet prays to God to save the Muslims and rid them of their present plight so that they may regain their lost Faith which was the source of all their power and pelf:

If the Faith would now save us,
From insult, contempt, disgrace,
Then people would be happiest
If God may grant this grace. (p. 10)

The author has at times used strange English words and constructions like Saturn for Satan (p. 120.), in grief and gear (p. 89), culvacade (instead of cavalcade) (p. 148), piloes (p. 188), etc.

The book abounds in typographical mistakes, so much that they have marred the beauty of some very good pieces of the book and made some of the lines quite unintelligible for ordinary readers. It show that the proof-reading of the book has not been done properly. It is hoped that these mistakes will be corrected in the next edition, and due care will be taken by revising the whole book in order to avoid the omissions and misstatements, particularly the errors in citation and English translation of the Qur'anic verses.

In spite of the above flaws and short-comings, the book is a good attempt to versify some chief events from the biography of the Holy Prophet. It is heartening to note that a special award has been given to the author by the President of Pakistan, General Zia ul-Haq on the occasion of the award of prizes to the writers of the Best Books on Seerat of the Holy Prophet on 12th Rabi' al-Awwal last year (1403 A.H.). It is hoped that this award will serve as an effective encouragement for the author and inspire him to render even better service to Islam and that the author will take even greater pains in collecting more useful and authentic data from the source books on Islam and produce better and more comprehensive works on Islam and its founder.

Islamabad.

'Ali Raza Naqvi.